



Northern Spotted Owl Habitat Conservation Plan Conservation Strategy

Board of Natural Resources
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What is an HCP?

- The federal Endangered Species Act authorizes incidental take permits (ITP) to be issued for “take” of listed species, provided that the ITP holder have a Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP).
- HCPs describe the anticipated effects of the proposed taking; how those impacts will be minimized or mitigated; and how the HCP is to be funded.



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Habitat Conservation Plans Under the Endangered Species Act



The endangered California tiger salamander is among the listed species included in the East Contra Costa County Habitat Conservation Plan.

Introduction
Why should we save endangered species? Congress answered this question in the introduction to the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (Act), recognizing that endangered and threatened species of wildlife and plants “are of esthetic, ecological, educational, historical, recreational, and scientific value to the Nation and its people.”

After this finding, Congress said that the purposes of the Act are “... to provide a means whereby the ecosystems upon which endangered species and threatened species depend may be conserved [and] to provide a program for the conservation of such . . . species. . . .” Habitat Conservation Plans (HCPs) under section 10(a)(2)(B) of the Act provide for partnerships with non-Federal parties to conserve the ecosystems upon which listed species depend, ultimately contributing to their recovery.

What are HCPs?
HCPs are planning documents required as part of an application for an incidental take permit. They describe the anticipated effects of the proposed taking; how those impacts will be minimized, or mitigated; and how the HCP is to be funded.

HCPs apply to both listed and non-listed species, including those that are candidates or have been proposed for listing. Conserving species before they are in danger of extinction or are likely to become so can also provide early benefits and prevent the need for listing.

Who needs an incidental take permit?
Anyone whose otherwise-lawful activities will result in the “incidental take” of a listed wildlife species needs a permit. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) can help determine whether a proposed project or action is likely to result in “take” and whether an HCP is needed. FWS staff can also provide technical assistance to help design a project to avoid take. For example, the project could be designed with seasonal restrictions on construction to minimize disturbance to a species.

What is the benefit of an incidental take permit and habitat conservation plan to a private landowner?
The permit allows the permit-holder to legally proceed with an activity that would otherwise result in the unlawful take of a listed species. The permit-holder also has assurances from the FWS through the “No Surprises” regulation.

What is “take”?
The Act defines “take” as “. . . to harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, or collect, or to attempt to engage in any such conduct.” “Harm” includes significant habitat modification that actually kills or injures a listed species through impairing essential behavior such as breeding, feeding, or sheltering.

Section 9 of the Act prohibits the take of endangered and threatened species. The purpose of the incidental take permit is to exempt non-Federal permit-holders—such as States and private landowners—from the prohibitions of section 9, not to authorize the activities that result in take.

What do habitat conservation plans do?
In developing habitat conservation plans, people applying for incidental take permits describe measures designed to minimize and mitigate the effects of their actions—to ensure that species will be conserved and to contribute to their recovery.

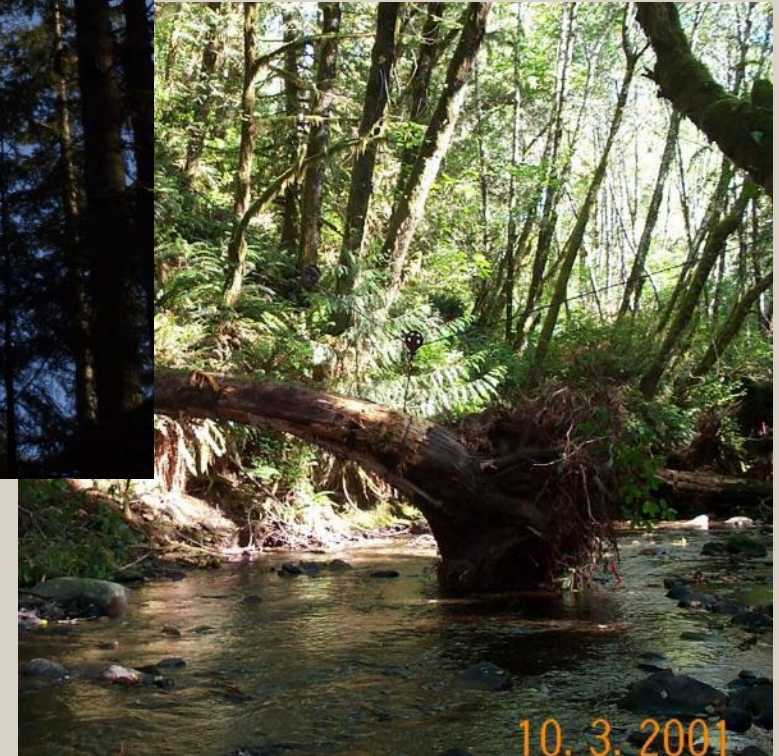
Habitat conservation plans are required to meet the permit issuance criteria of section 10(a)(2)(B) of the Act:

- (i) taking will be incidental;
- (ii) the applicant will, to the maximum extent practicable, minimize and mitigate the impacts of the taking;



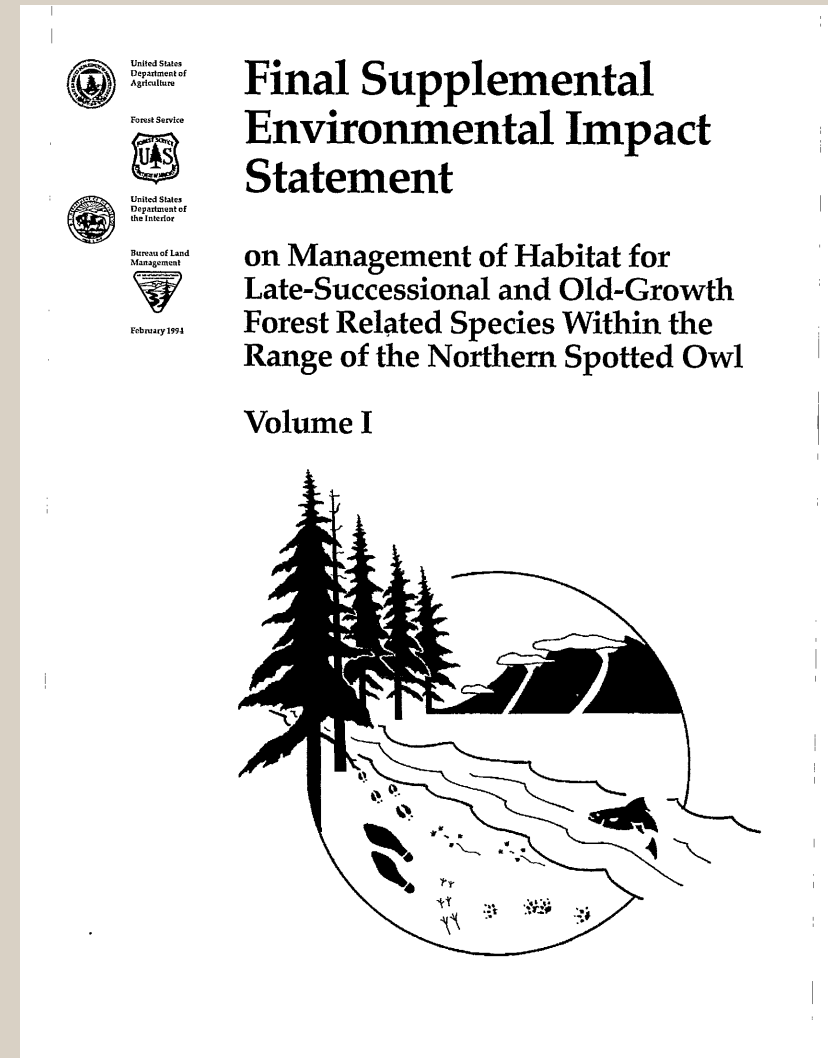
What is an HCP?

- Mitigation for impacts to listed species may take the form of preserving habitat through an acquisition or a conservation easement, enhancing or restoring degraded or former habitat, creating new habitat, establishing buffer areas around existing habitat, modifying land-use practices, and restricting access to habitat.



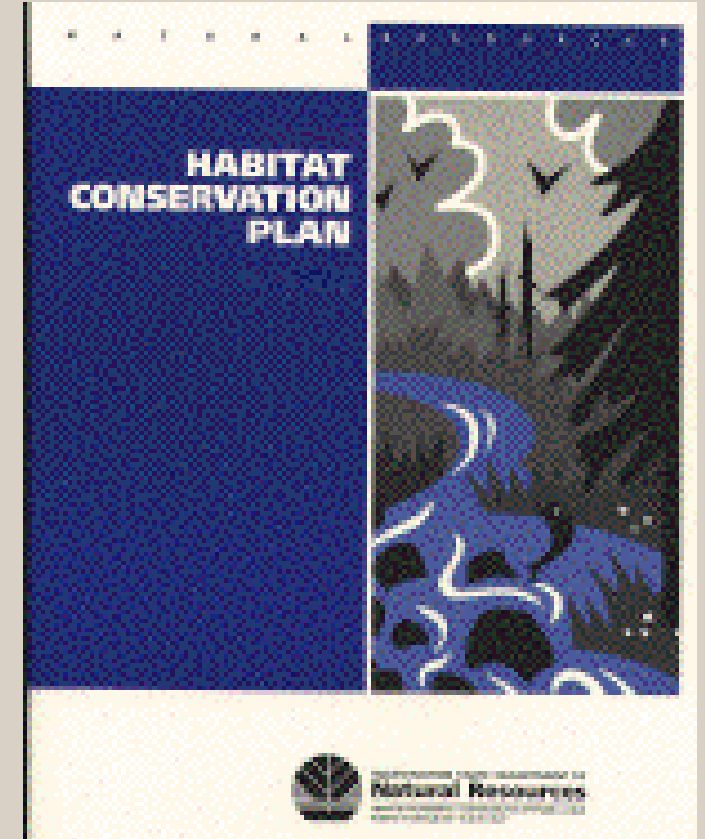
What is an HCP?

- In 1995, DNR established a science team of state, federal and independent scientists to address, owl, murrelet and salmon conservation needs. Aided by recommendations from the federal spotted owl and murrelet draft recovery plans, the President's NW Forest Plan, and the latest scientific reports, the science team provided the foundation of the HCP strategies.



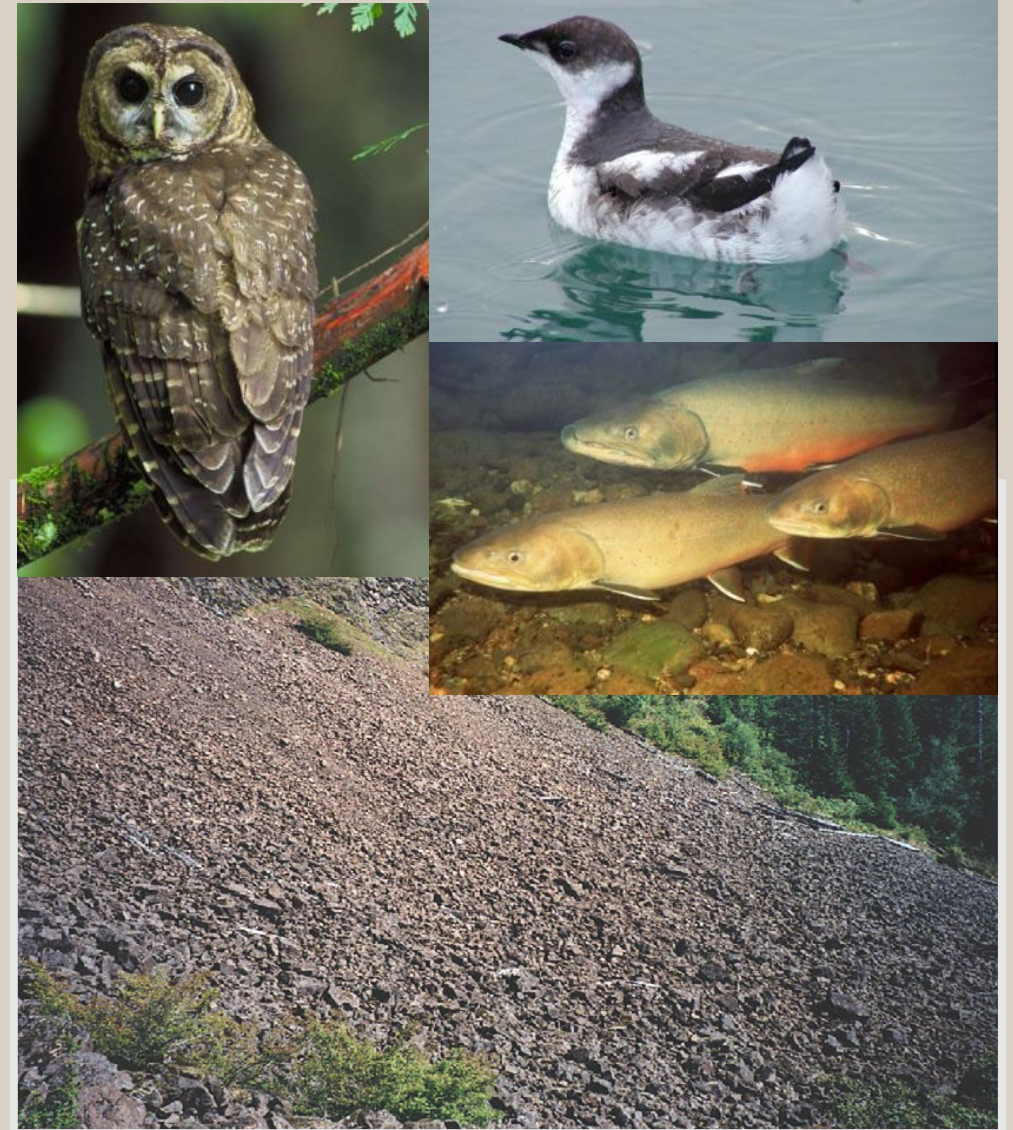
What is an HCP?

- Adopted by DNR in 1997
- Multi-species HCP covering federally listed species regulated by USFWS and NOAA Fisheries
- Long-term land management plan; 70 years in duration with options for three, 10-year extensions for a maximum duration of 100 years
- Covers approximately 1.9 million acres within the range of the spotted owl including the eastern slopes of the Cascades



Trust Lands HCP Strategies (main)

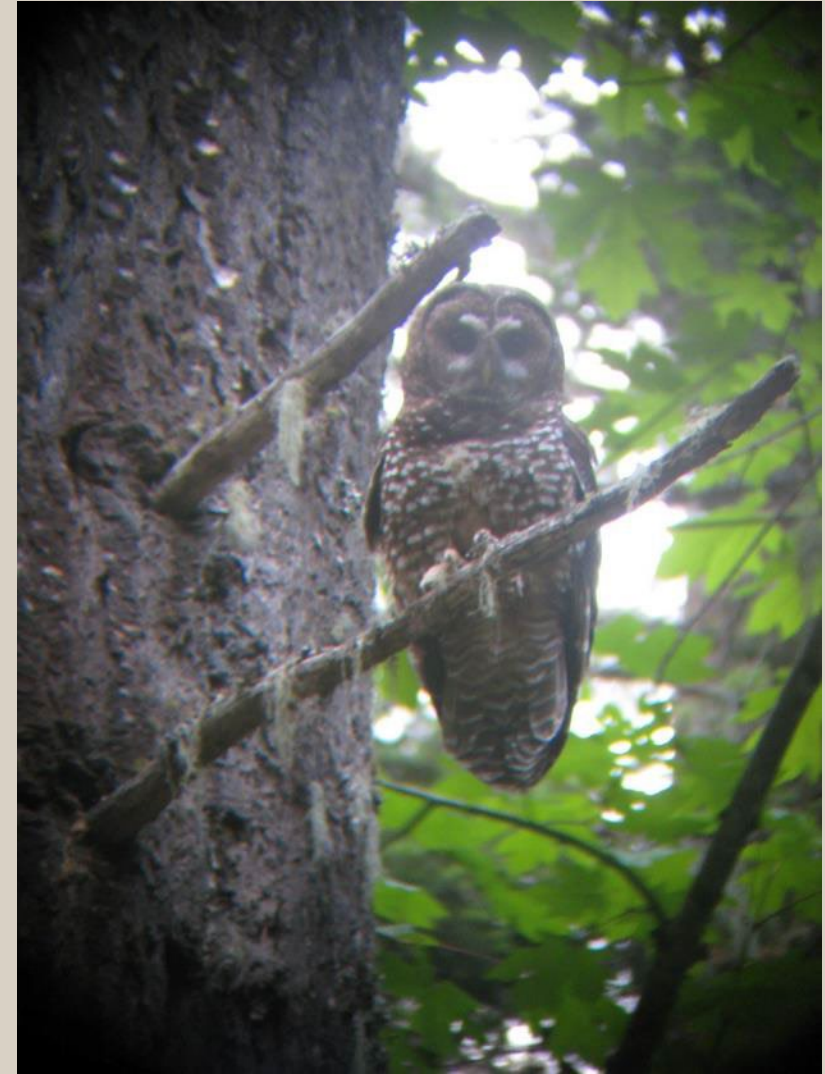
- Riparian
 - Implemented in all of Western WA
- Multispecies
 - Implemented in all of Western WA
- Marbled Murrelet
 - Implemented in most of Western WA
- Northern Spotted Owl (NSO)
 - Implemented on all HCP covered lands (Western WA & Eastern slopes of the Cascades)



NSO Strategy Objectives

DNR's HCP conservation objective for the northern spotted owl is to provide habitat that makes a significant contribution to:

- Demographic support,
- Maintenance of species distribution, and
- Facilitation of dispersal



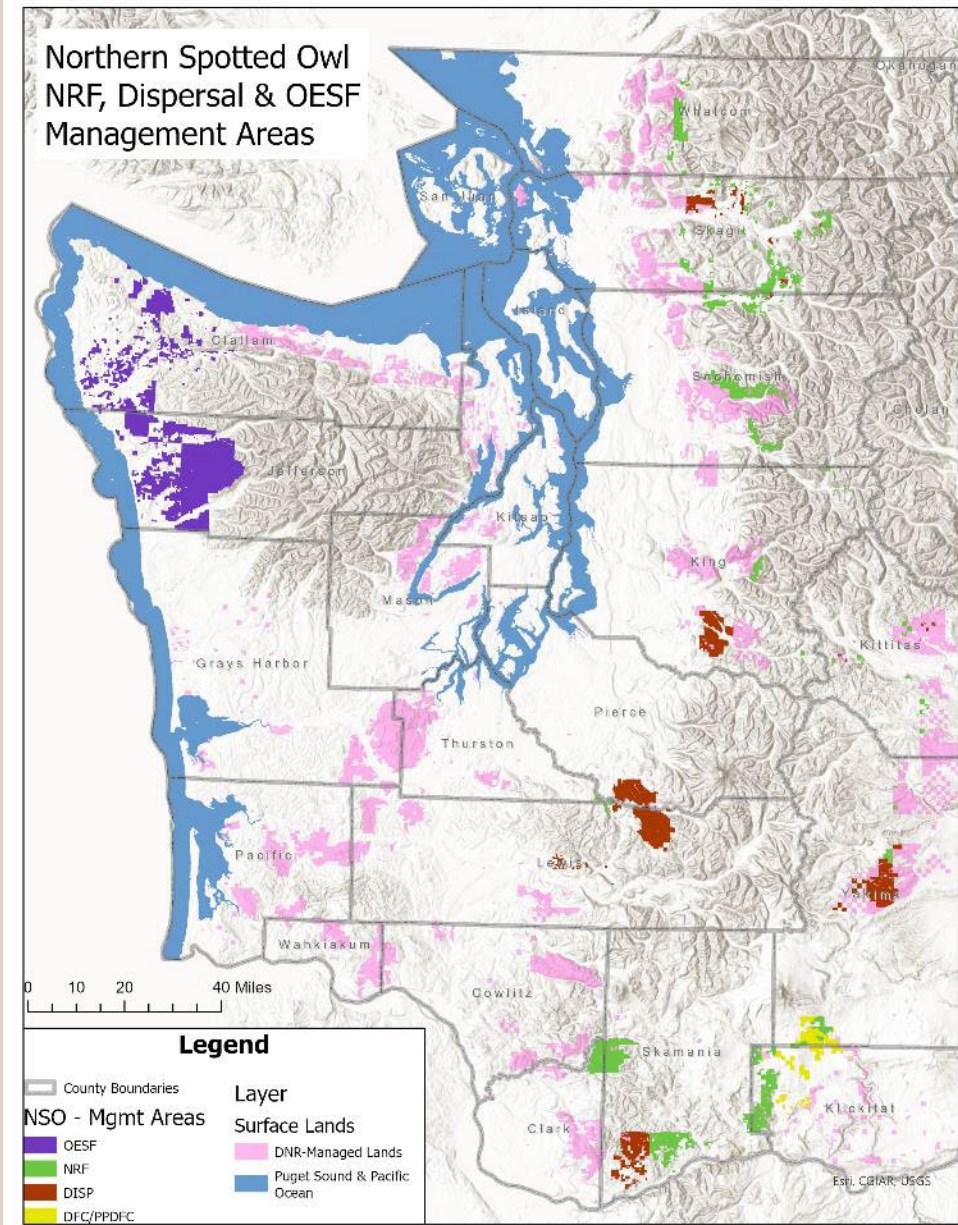
NSO Strategy Objectives

- Demographic Support
 - Demographic support refers to the contribution of individual territorial spotted owls or clusters of spotted owl sites to the stability and viability of the entire population
- Maintenance of Species Distribution
 - Maintenance of species distribution refers to supporting the continued presence of the spotted owl population in as much of its historic range as possible
- Dispersal
 - Dispersal is the movement of juvenile, subadult, and adult spotted owls from one sub-population to another



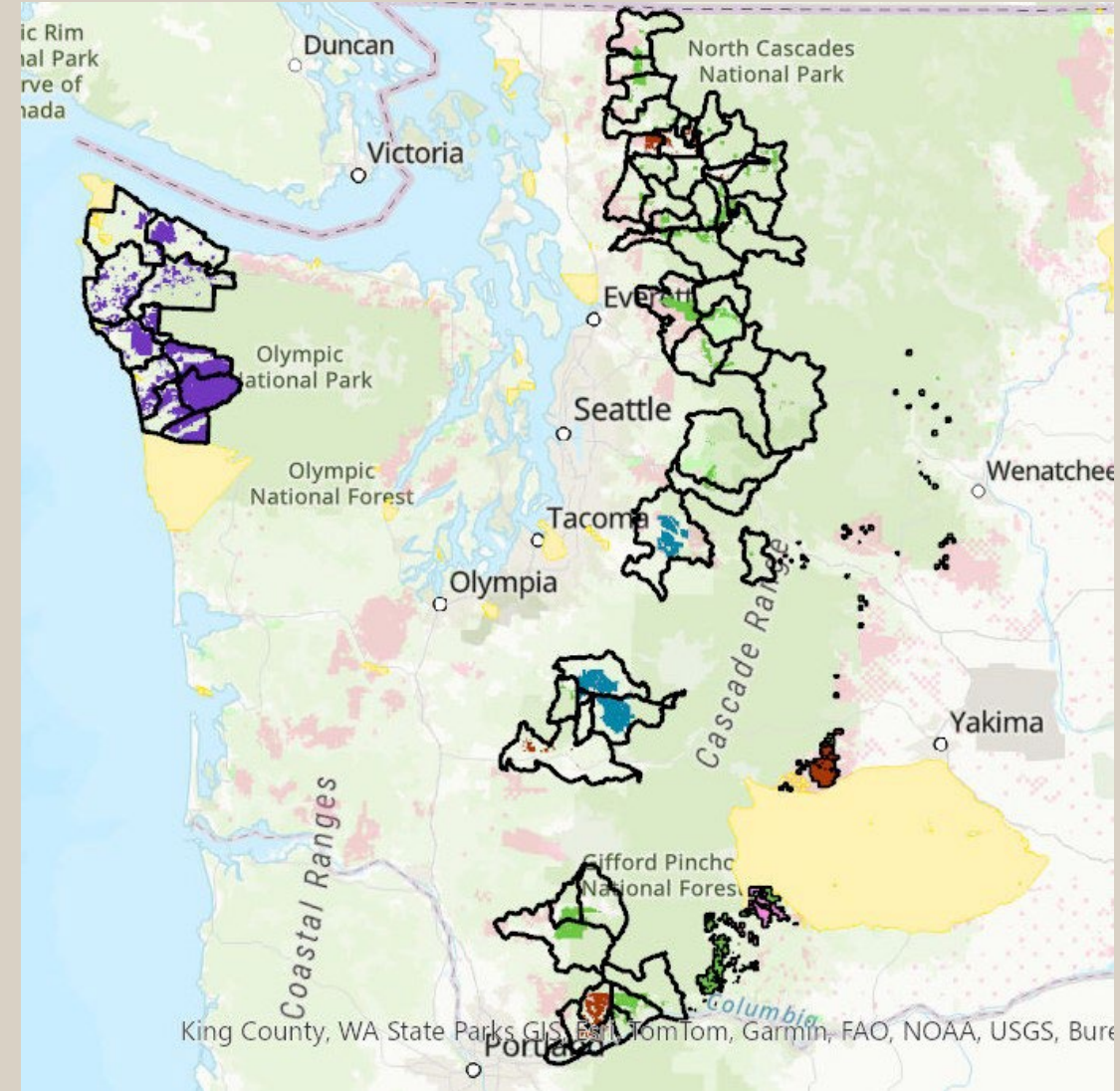
Strategy Implementation

- DNR achieves these objectives by providing habitat in specific management areas.
- Management areas are located in proximity to Federal Lands recovery areas
- Management areas have specific habitat qualities and threshold amounts to achieve
- Habitat thresholds are measured by geographic units
 - Spotted owl management units (SOMUs) vary in size depending on the management area



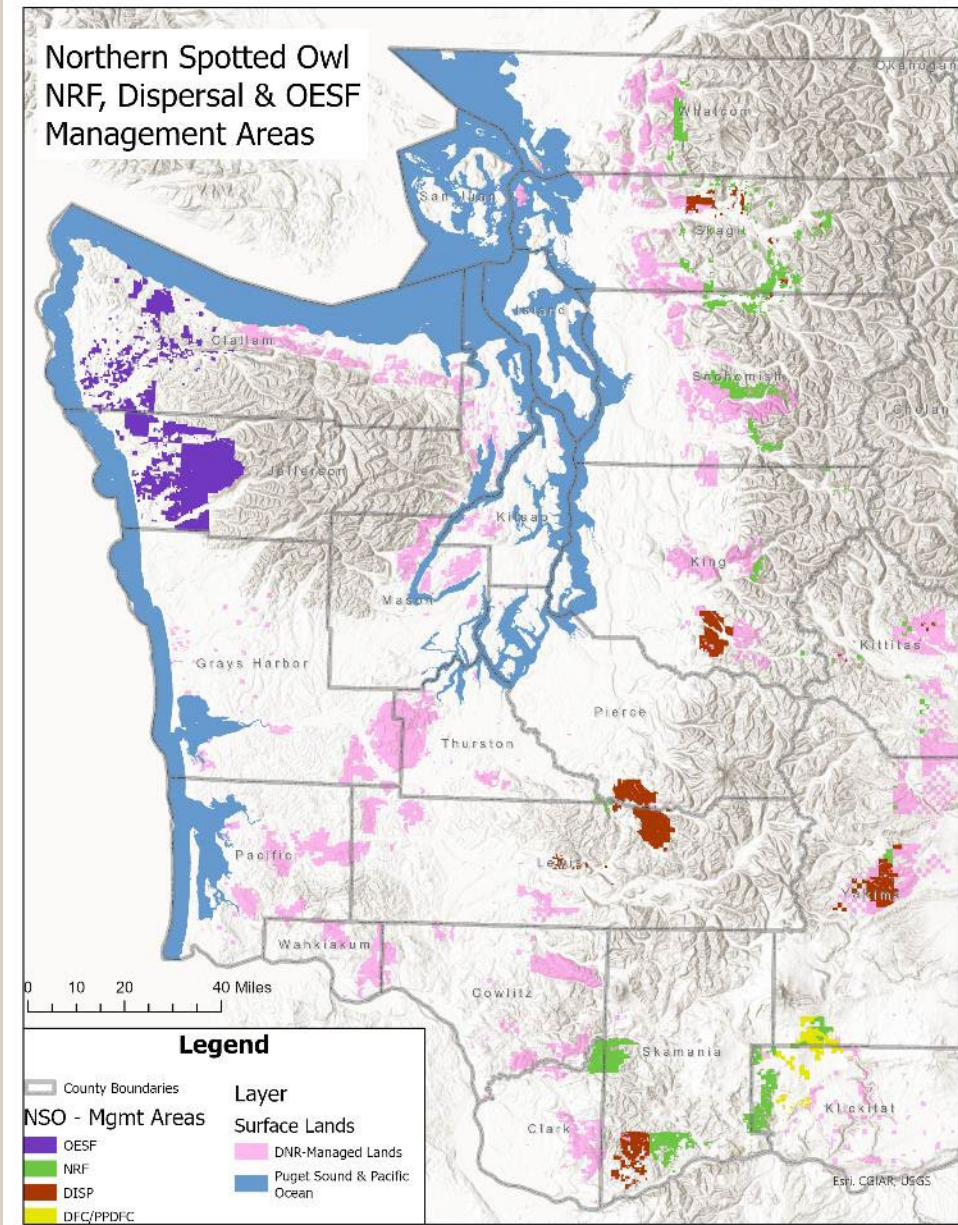
Strategy Implementation SOMUs

- A geographic boundary to measure habitat thresholds and distribute habitat within a management area.
- Depending on the objective and landscape, SOMUs are based on Watershed Analysis Units, Landscape Planning Units, ¼ Townships, or modified versions.
- SOMU – “spotted owl management unit”



Strategy Implementation

- Nesting, Roosting & Foraging (NRF) management areas
 - Designated in areas intermingled with and adjacent to federal lands designated within the NW Forest Plan Reserves
 - Generally achieve & maintain 50% suitable NRF habitat within SOMU
 - Habitat types that qualify as NRF habitat are generally higher quality that include components such as snags, down wood and larger trees



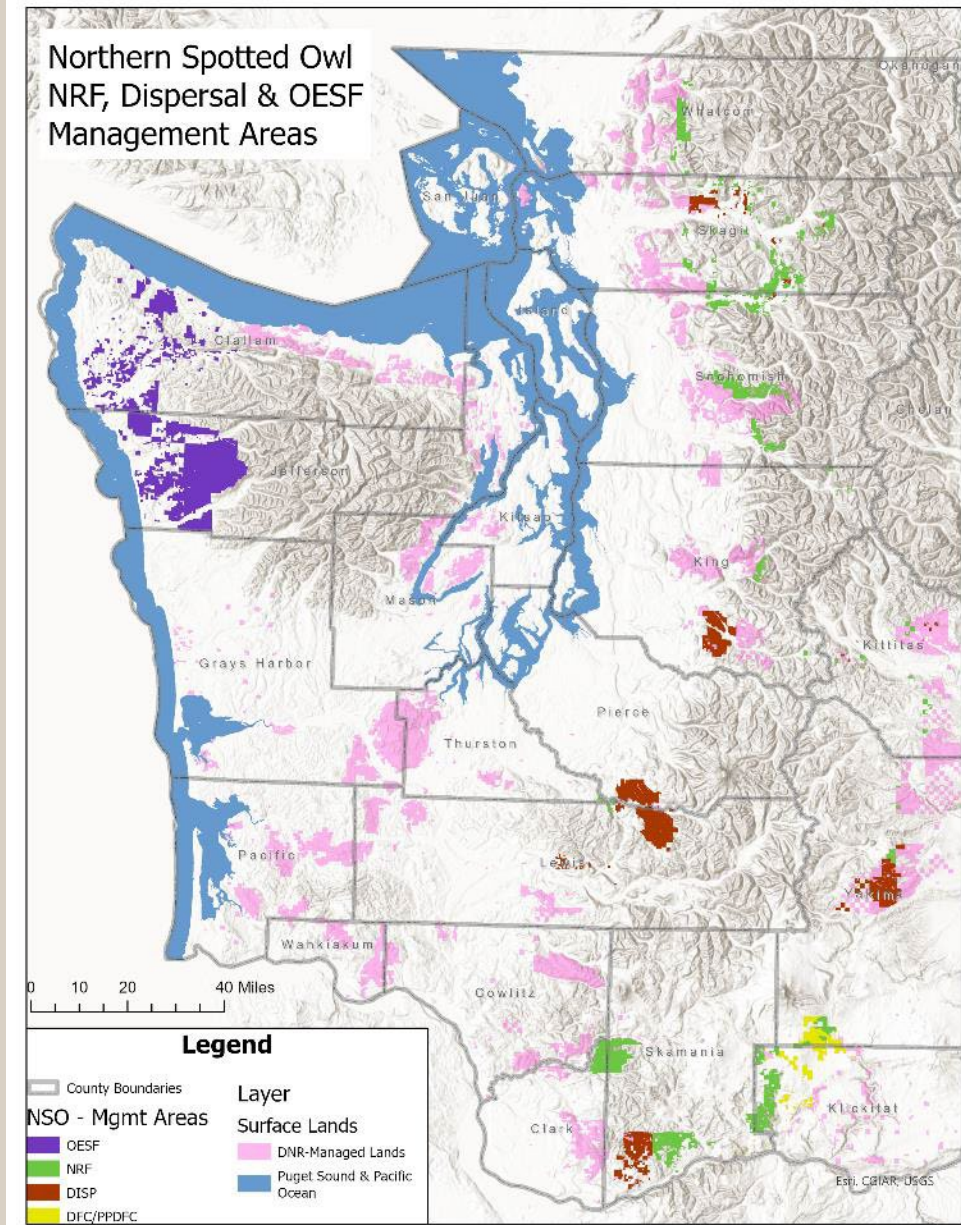
Strategy Implementation

- Nest Patches
 - Provides nesting structure to supplement the roosting & foraging habitat of NRF
 - 500 acre Nest Patch includes a 300 acre core and a 200 acre buffer, located within NRF management areas.
 - Long-term commitment to providing this structure in NRF management areas.
 - Often overlap or are in proximity to known nest sites.



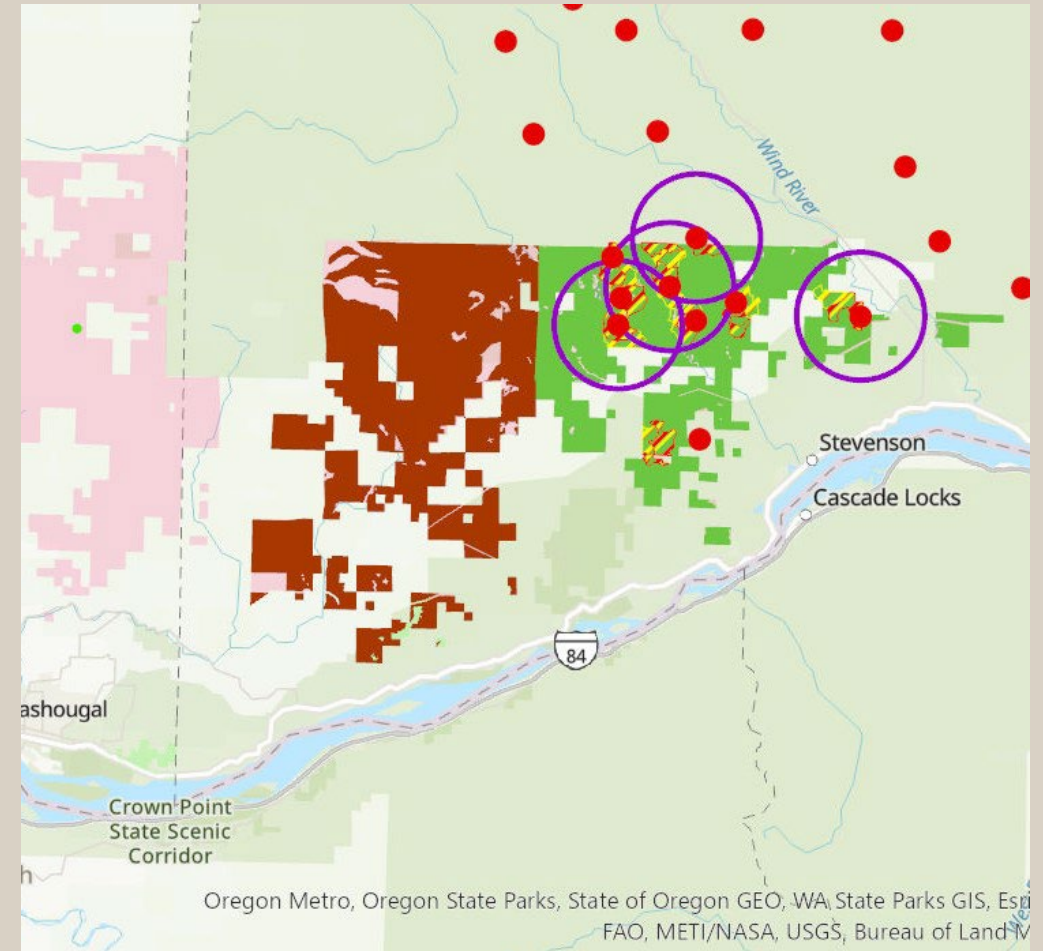
Strategy Implementation

- Dispersal Management Areas
 - 50% dispersal habitat or better per SOMU
 - Dispersal habitat is generally a simpler stand structure because of its dispersing objective
 - SPS dispersal has a two-tier approach
 - 35% Movement, Roosting & Foraging habitat (\approx NRF)
 - 15% Movement habitat (\approx dispersal)



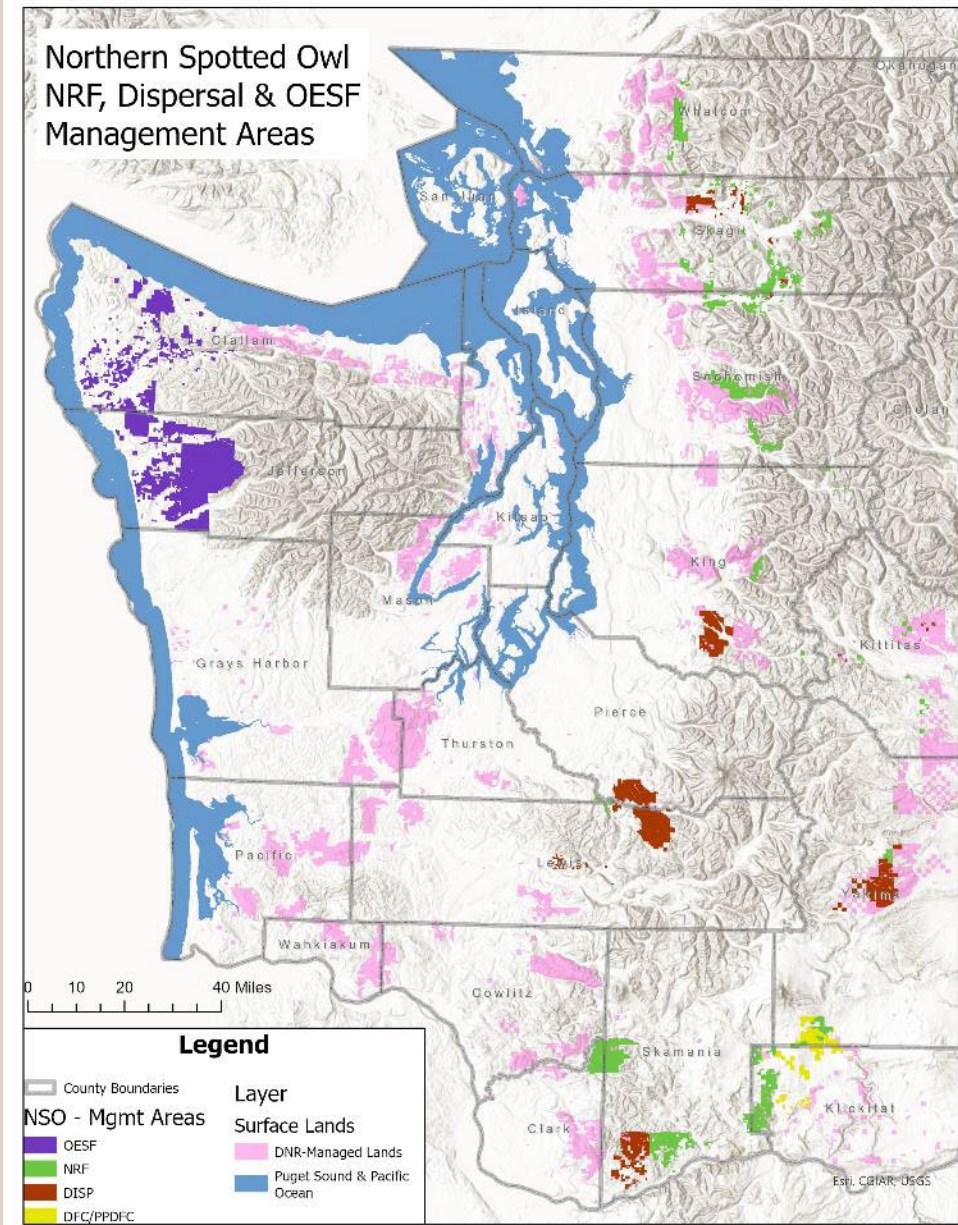
Strategy Implementation

- Example of the orientation of DNR-managed lands with spotted owl conservation (dispersal and NRF areas) in proximity to Forest Service with the objective of providing habitat and dispersal of owls across the Columbia River.
- Nest Patches identified within NRF area and spotted owl pair locations.



Strategy Implementation

- Olympic Experimental State Forest (OESF)
 - Has a two-tier habitat approach
 - Habitat threshold is 40% of each SOMU
 - 20% old-forest habitat
 - 20% young-forest habitat or better



Next Best or Candidate Stands or Near NRF

- Where DNR is below its habitat threshold in a SOMU, it has identified stands that are either non-habitat or lower quality habitat to be enhanced or allow that stand to grow and achieve habitat conditions.
- Management of these stands can occur if management activities do not increase the amount of time that would be required for the habitat threshold to be reached.



Commitment of Habitat Thresholds

- Where DNR is above its habitat threshold in a SOMU, it may harvest habitat as long as the total amount of habitat does not fall below the habitat threshold and does not reduce the amount and distribution of nest patches (in NRF).



Review of the HCP ITP by FWS in 2024 and Threats to NSO

- Conclusions within the Re-issued Biological Opinion, 2024
 - FWS concluded that continued implementation of the HCP/ITP is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the spotted owl and is not likely to destroy or adversely modify designated critical habitat. Modification of the ITP is not required.
 - Competition from the barred owl is now the primary driver behind spotted owl population declines, greatly overwhelming the impacts of habitat loss or degradation over the past 25 years.



